

The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, October 26. 1695.

Quest. 1. I beg leave to ask your advice in a matter which is too hard for me, and wherein depends all my future happiness. 'Tis this, There is a Gentleman who pretends a great kindness to me, and has made many protestations that he'll marry me when an old woman is dead, who he expects shou'd make him her heir, but says he is fearful she will never give her consent for him to marry one that is so unequal to him as to Fortune. He wou'd have had me break a piece of silver with him as a token of Fidelity, but was not free that any friend of mine shou'd be by, as a witness. If I shou'd consent to this, I doubt he wou'd expect some greater Favour than I shou'd be willing to grant before marriage. I have promis'd to submit to your Judgment, and therefore beg your answer by the next Mercury; whether two persons being just one to another, and designing really to marry when their circumstances will permit, may not lie together before marriage, without a Breach of Gods Law. Pray fail not to answer, &c.

Ans'w. As we have said before, we don't expect that any of these sort of *Curists* will have patience or honesty enough to stay for our answer, which we observe they are zealous, more than any others, to have precisely by the next *Mercury*, for a plain reason, least they shou'd lose time and not make shift enough to their Ruine. But we must confess amongst all our hasty querists of either Sex, we never yet met with any that came so home to the purpose, or spoke such plain English as this present: She is not it seems at all concern'd at the *Infamy* which has been justly laid on *Concubinage* without marriage, nor the particular *Laws* of her own *Nation*, nor the usages of the *Church* wherein she was born, the *Excommunication* she incurs, and the publick penance she ought to undergo, and if discipline be so broken that those things are now unusual or unregarded, we know whom we are to thank for't. If nothing of all this deserve a thought, one wou'd think the *Illegitimation* of her children shou'd have some little *Influence* on her mind: all that has been said already is certain and inevitable, but there are other *Inconveniences* which are next to certain, which it may be she may be more concern'd at than those already mention'd. Has she any security that her Spark will be true after all, and won't turn her to shift when he has rifled her of all he cares for? Did she never know any Instances of such forsaken fools? Nay, how many can she give to the contrary? Is there any likelihood that the Honour of a person may be depended upon, who wou'd break the *Laws* of his own and all other *Nations*? If women generally think their *Men* is hard by reason of their Subjection to their *Husbands*, and that despotic power which they pretend to over them, how much harder must theirs be who depend for their Bread, on the Lust of any man, his absolute will and pleasure, and the Ebbs and Flows of his Fancy and Humour? Nay, may have their children as well as themselves turn'd-out of Doors every moment, without any help from those *Laws* which they despis'd? And can there be a more vehement suspicion of any thing than that this wonderfully virtuous Spark will never marry *one*, when he has already got all that many marry for, especially when he does little less than fairly confess his *Intensions*, by refusing to let her have any witness, so much as of the contract between 'em. Nay supposing he had a design of being just to her, wou'd any person of *Discretion* give any other such a violent *Temptation* to be otherwise, as he must needs have when thus left to his own Liberty? For if variety have such Charms to *Lend* and *Wickid* men, that even the most publick sacred vows and legal bonds of *marriage* can not, oftentimes, keep 'em true to one person, how much less likely is't they shou'd remaine to *what* nothing but their own private word obliges.

'em? All this is said on supposition the man tempts the woman: But if the danger lies a t'other side, as one wou'd be almost ready to believe by reading the Query; and this forward Lady has such a mind to an Estate, and is in such haft to get it, that she'll throw off all the modesty of her Sex to obtain it, and for ever forfeit the esteem of all virtuous and pious persons, who she cannot but know, abhor the very thoughts of any such practices; let her at least and all others who may be in her circumstances, have some regard to the righteous Judgment of God, who has said, he'll Judge *Whoremongers*, and *Adulterers*, who requires the utmost purity of Life and Heart in Christians, on no less pains than those of Eternal Misery; and who has so strictly charg'd 'em in his holy word, not to deceive themselves, because neither *Fornicators*, nor *Adulterers*, nor *unclean Persons*, shall ever inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Quest. 2. Tell your bumble Servants, Pray Gentlemen, why the persons who did formerly Preach down Tobacco, and Periwigs, do now smoke Tobacco, and wear Wigs without any Scruple as well as their Neighbors?

Ans'w. Because those who once chiefly did so, and their whole party too, are now grown wiser. And 'tis very hard to forbid any from doing so.

Quest. 3. Suppose a Man has made conscience of all his ways through the whole course of his Life, and yet in sickness by reason of the Extremity thereof, is distracted, and dyes raving and blaspheming. What are we to Judge of this Man?

Ans'w. Doubtless we are to Judge Charitably, as God will mercifully, who will never punish an involuntary, which is not properly an humane action.

Quest. 4. Why our blessed Saviour loved St. John best, when St. Peter loved him most?

Ans'w. St. John appears to have lov'd the person of our Saviour better than St. Peter, whose Zeal for him seems to have been chiefly grounded on the mistaken Notion of his Countrymen, that he was to be a *Temporal Messiah*, to conquer *Kingdoms*, and make his Apostles his Vice-roys all the world over. Besides, St. John was a relation of our Saviours, and of a more agreeable temper than St. Peter who was hot and hasty, tho' well meaning and honest.

Quest. 5. Pray the true Interpretation of that Text, St. Luk. 23. 31. "If they do these things in a Green Tree, what shall be done in the Dry?"

Ans'w. It seems to have been a proverbial speech among the *Jews*, or at least to allude to some such speech, and what the meaning of it is we shall more easily discover if we can find in what sense a *Dry Tree*, and *Green* are taken in Holy Scripture and the *Jewish* writings. Now *Grotius* and others tell us, that the *Jews* did commonly call *Good Men*, *Ligna viridia*, *Green Trees*, or *Green Wood*, as *bad men*, *Dry*, it being a Proverb trite enough amongst them. "If there be two pieces of *Dry Wood* together, and one of *Green*, the *Dry* will burn up the *Green*; whereby they either designed to warn men of ill company; or, as *Grotius* thinks, wou'd signify that *good men*, as being generally the smaller number, are easily opprest by the *Conspiracy of Evil*. And that this Scheme of Speech was taken from common conversation and used in the sacred writings, will appear by several Texts in the Old Testament and New, as indeed how should our Saviours and the Prophets express themselves, but as their Countrymen used to do? One very clear place is in *Ezek. 20. 47.* Where God says. "I will kindle a Fire, and it shall devour every *Green-Tree* in thee, and every *Dry Tree*, which is explain'd in the 21. from 3. "I will cut off from thee the *righteous* and the *wicked*. And *wicked men* are frequently compar'd in the New Testament to *dead* and *frail* *Trees* and *Branches*.

whole

whose end is to be burned. Thus the Baptist, St. Mat. 3. 10. "The axe is laid to the root of the Tree, every Tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the Fire. And to the same purpose our Saviour in the 13th of St. Mat. 10. from their observations apply'd to the context, we shall have no difficulty to come at the sense of the words.

In the verses before, our Saviour advis'd the men of Jerusalem, who wept when they saw him leading to his passion not to weep for him, but themselves and their children, because of the terrible Judgments which were coming upon them. "For if they do these things; if these things are done in the Green-Tree, what shall be done in the Dry? If I my self being just and innocent, m^t yet by the righteous dispensation of my Father, suffer these things from the Romans; what then must your wicked City and Nation expect to suffer from the same hands? If the righteous scarcely be saved, that is not without many Tribulations and Calamities, what will become of the Sinner and ungodly and, as St. Peter says, If Judgment begin at the House of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel?

Quest. 6. If I can Communicate weekly without sin, is it not a sin for me not to Communicate?

Ans^r. We dare not affirm that, there being a great deal of difference between those two proposition, nor will the consequence always hold, nor is it easily determine precisely in these matters. All we can say upon't is, "the frequenter the better, if with a devout and prepar'd mind; nay, we could never see any reason why habitual preparation shoud not be sufficient where there's no room for adulst, or where a persons whole life, or much the greater part thereof, is employ'd in acts of piety and religion, which must needs produce a constant and an awful fence of the divine presence, and such an habitual prevailing love to God as was in the primitive Christians, who yet did by no means live idle, but follow'd their own employments, and took care of their own houses; those who neglected this, on any pretence whatsoever, being accounted by the Apostle even worse than infidels. And yet we know these good men did communicate not only weekly, but daily, nor can we think that the frequency thereof made it easier, and less impulsive upon their minds, which is the common, but we think weak a reason against frequent communion, that which brought the Papists to once a year, and some others to not above once, perhapt, in seven years; we see I say that such a flighting the Sacrament as is objected, is by no means a necessary consequence of such frequent receiving, the contrary appearing in the primitive Christians already mention'd, who may be thought to have ow'd much of their exemplary piety, constancy, and zeal to this very practice. And we are sure it has still much the same effects on some of those pious persons (all that we know of 'em) who are now so happy to communicate daily, who certainly can have no greater Bliss till they come to Heaven.

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